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Today's coronavirus news: Toronto police arrest, lay charges after anti-lockdown rally held at Yonge-Dundas Square; The Beer Store temporarily closes one of its locations after employee tests positive

Meanwhile: Fear that Quebecers will catch a new variant of COVID-19 on vacation is what's driving demands by the Quebec premier for Ottawa to ban non-essential flights to the country.

By **Star staff**
wire services

Sat., Jan. 23, 2021 | 19 min. read

The latest [coronavirus](#) news from Canada and around the world Saturday. This file will be updated throughout the day. Web links to longer stories if available.

9:35 p.m.: Toronto police arrested 10 people and charged seven of them after an anti-lockdown rally took place at Yonge-Dundas Square on Saturday.

Protests against health measures took place at Nathan Phillips Square, Yonge-Dundas Square and Queen's Park, police said. The protests lasted for several hours and were not stopped by police right away.

The province has imposed a stay-at-home order and declared a second state of emergency, prohibiting outdoor gatherings of more than five people in order to limit the spread of COVID-19.

[Read the full story by Zena Salem.](#)

9:28 p.m.: A Beer Store outlet on Wilson Avenue in North York has closed temporarily after an employee tested positive for COVID-19, the business said in a statement Saturday evening.

The Beer Store said the employee's last shift was on Jan. 20. It added that all other employees who may have been affected are monitoring their symptoms or self-isolating. The location at 1718 Wilson Ave., west of Jane Street, will remain closed until Monday for cleaning, the company said.

8:38 p.m.: Liquor restrictions in Fort Simpson are set to be lifted on February 1, the village's mayor has said.

The village voted to lift the restrictions in November. However, the change requires formalization from the N.W.T. government, meaning the restrictions did not simply lift the day following that plebiscite.

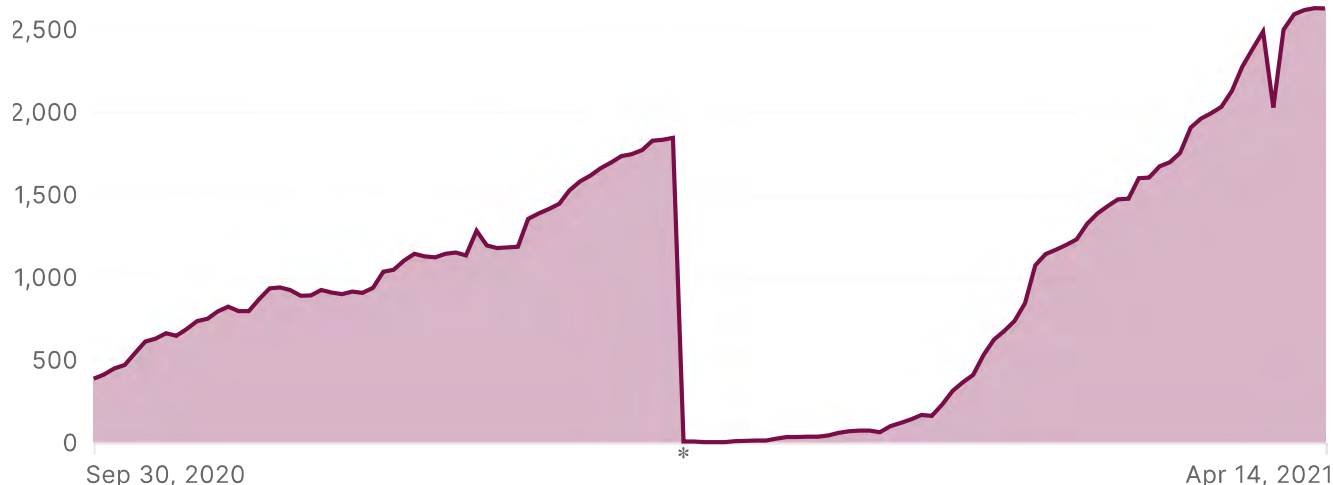
COVID-19 cases at Ontario's publicly funded schools

Last updated Apr 15. Data current as of 2 p.m. the previous school day. Recent cases are those reported in the last 14 days.



(+) numbers new on Apr 14

Tracking the change in total recent cases over time



Unspecified cases are those not identified as either student or staff for privacy reasons. Recommended isolation period for COVID-19 cases is 14 days.

*Beginning Jan. 11, only some public health regions reopened for in-person learning. [See here for details on which schools reopened when.](#)

Mayor of Fort Simpson Sean Whelly on Friday said a regulation had now been drafted that would lift restrictions from February 1. The territorial government's Department of Finance, which holds oversight of the relevant legislation, did not respond to confirm that date when approached by Cabin Radio.

Fort Simpson will still have restrictions in place, despite the plebiscite's result, as the territory must abide by separate, pandemic-related restrictions on alcohol sales mandated for all N.W.T. communities. The plebiscite applied only to a set of restrictions specific to Fort Simpson that had existed before the pandemic.

The pandemic rules state customers are limited to a maximum spend of \$200 per day at any N.W.T. liquor store, plus a limit of six mickeys (375-ml bottles) of spirits in any 24-hour period.

The plebiscite was held in response to a petition signed by more than 150 Fort Simpson residents asking for the village's restrictions to be removed.

November's ballot saw 240 of 730 eligible residents vote, with 175 in favour of the change. Fifty-eight were opposed while seven ballots were rejected.

The result was criticized by some residents who felt not enough public notice had been given beforehand.

Finance minister Caroline Wawzonek dismissed that complaint.

"Based on all of the information I have received to date, I am confident in the integrity of the plebiscite held in the village of Fort Simpson," Wawzonek said in response.

6:06 p.m.: Fraser Health has declared two new COVID-19 outbreaks, including at the North Fraser Pretrial Centre, where 20 people in custody have tested positive.

The health authority says it is working to identify others who may have had contact with those who tested positive at the jail in Port Coquitlam, B.C.

There have been several outbreaks in prisons and jails across Canada, including at Mission Institution in B.C.'s Fraser Valley, where an inmate died in April.

Fraser Health says there is also a new outbreak at the Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster.

It says two patients tested positive for COVID-19 in a surgical unit at the hospital and the outbreak is limited to that unit.

The emergency department remains open and the health authority says other areas of the hospital are not affected by the outbreak.

The health authority also declared over two previously announced outbreaks at the rehabilitation unit at Queen's Park Care Centre in New Westminster and the Good Samaritan Delta View Care Centre.

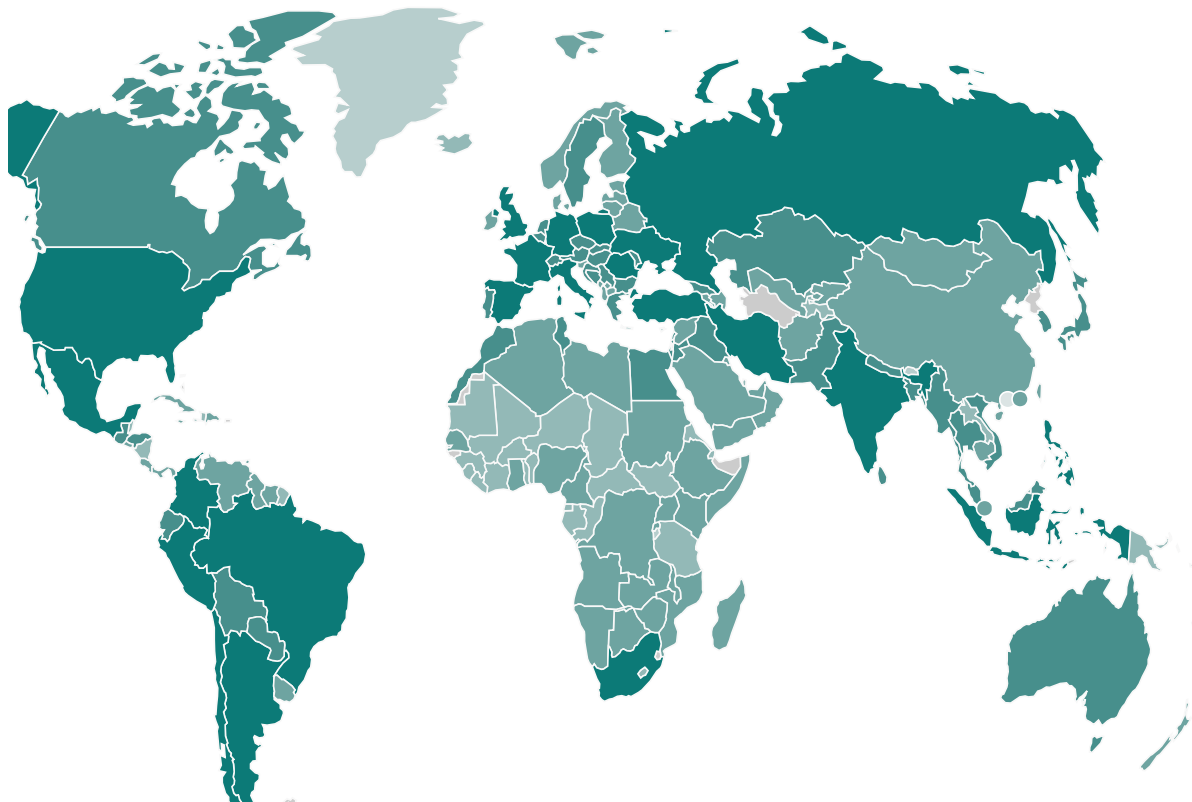
5:03 p.m.: Canada Post employees and contractors who typically work the afternoon shift are self-isolating after a COVID-19 outbreak at a key mail facility in Mississauga, Ont.

The postal service says in a statement that Peel Public Health recommended the precautionary measure as the most effective way to control further spread at the Gateway facility on Dixie Road.

It says afternoon-shift workers who were at the facility Friday evening were told to leave and self-isolate for 14 days, while those who were not there Friday were told to self-isolate for 14 days from the last day they were at work.

Countries with confirmed COVID-19 deaths

Data current as of: August 18



Canada Post did not say how many employees were affected by the measure, but it says they include those represented by unions, team leaders, managers, support teams and contracted cleaners.

It says it's also following other recommendations from Peel Public Health, including conducting on-site rapid testing of other employees next week and enforcing safety protocols with an increased focus on washrooms, lunch rooms and locker rooms.

"We understand this situation has been hard on employees at the facility and we will continue to follow the guidance of Public Health and keep them informed," the statement says.

"Given the significance of the Gateway facility within our processing network, we are evaluating and adapting our existing contingency plans to manage the impact on customers."

Rapid testing at the site has resulted in 42 positive tests over the past four days, Canada Post says.

It says there have been a total of 190 positive cases at the facility since Jan. 1.

Spokesman Phil Legault has said the facility is central to the Crown corporation's entire national delivery and processing network.

Legault said the plant continues to operate and process heavy incoming parcel volumes, but there will be delays.

More than 4,500 people work at the Mississauga site.

4:52 p.m.: An Ottawa company says it's received approval from Health Canada for its made-in-Canada rapid COVID-19 test.

Spartan Bioscience says it's now authorized to sell the diagnostic test, which is touted as providing on-site results within an hour.

The company originally unveiled a rapid test for COVID-19 last spring but had to voluntarily recall it and perform additional studies after Health Canada expressed some concerns.

At the time, Spartan said Health Canada was concerned about the "efficacy of the proprietary swab" for the testing product.

COVID-19 cases reported at Ontario's long-term care homes

Last updated Aug 16. Data current as of the afternoon of the previous day.

LTC homes with an active outbreak

54 (-8)

Confirmed active resident cases

342 (-24)

Confirmed active staff cases

124 (-43)

Total resident deaths

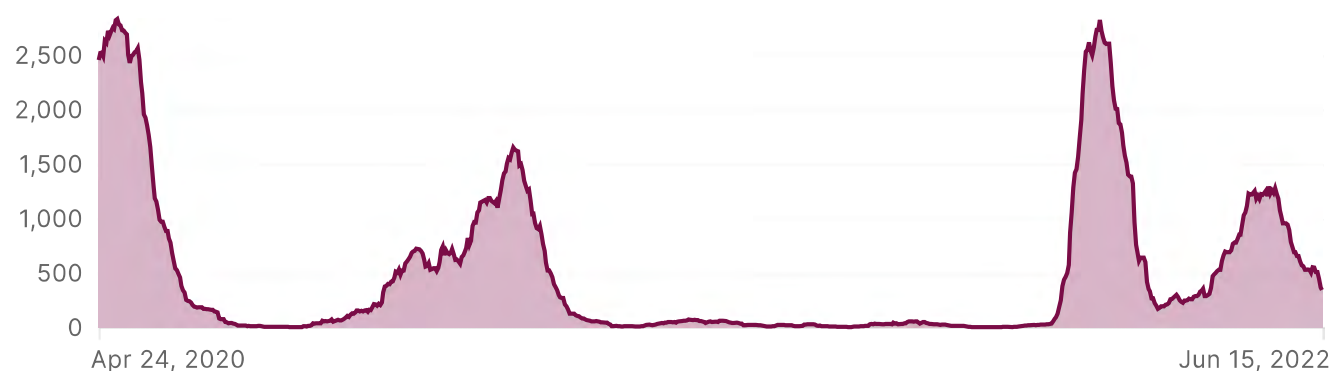
4,459 (+1)

Total staff deaths

13 (+0)

(*) change from previous day

Confirmed active resident cases by reported date



The data is extracted from the Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) system each day in the afternoon.

Spartan said the federal agency had no concerns about the accuracy and analytical performance of the product.

The company bills the new Spartan COVID-19 System as "the first truly mobile, rapid PCR test for COVID-19 for the Canadian market."

"The Spartan system will be able to provide quality results to remote communities, industries and settings with limited lab access, helping relieve the burden on overwhelmed healthcare facilities," the company said in a news release Saturday.

The Spartan COVID-19 System was developed through clinical evaluation completed in Canada and the U.S., with the University of Ottawa Heart Institute as one of the testing locations.

The company says it's already started production on the rapid tests.

A spokesperson for Health Canada says the new device meets the agency's requirements for both safety and effectiveness.

The news comes amid a continuing decline in COVID-19 cases in parts of Canada.

On Saturday, public health officials in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador said there were no new confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Public health officials in New Brunswick reported 17 new cases, 10 of which were in the Edmundston region, which was set to go into a lockdown first thing Sunday morning.

Both Quebec and Ontario reported fewer cases Saturday — 1,685 and 2,359 respectively.

However, officials in Ontario expressed concern about a highly contagious U.K. variant of the virus that was detected at a long-term care facility north of Toronto.

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit confirmed the variant was behind the outbreak at Roberta Place Retirement Lodge in Barrie, Ont., where 32 residents have died of COVID-19 and dozens of others have tested positive.

Fears of variants that can rapidly spread come as the federal government considers a mandatory quarantine in hotels for travellers returning to Canada.

4:45 p.m.: Montreal police say they responded this morning to two large gatherings in the city's Outremont neighbourhood, their third such intervention in the area in under 24 hours.

Service de Police de la Ville de Montreal spokeswoman Veronique Comtois says all three gatherings were held at places of worship and involved more than 10 people, the limit for indoor religious gatherings.

Police responded to the first gathering around 5:15 p.m. Friday, the second around 9:30 a.m. Saturday, and the third around two hours later at 11:45 a.m.

Officers took the names of people present at the scenes and will submit reports to Quebec's office of criminal prosecutions, which will decide whether to pursue further penalties.

Quebec banned religious gatherings in its latest round of lockdowns earlier this month, but reversed the ban on Thursday after outcry from religious groups.

Comtois says police issued three fines for curfew violations in the same area on Friday night, in incidents unrelated to the gathering earlier that evening.

4:43 p.m.: A teenager working at a long-term-care home has died, Middlesex-London Health Unit said Saturday, one of three new deaths and 50 new cases of COVID-19 reported in the region.

Ontario is reporting 2,359 new [COVID-19](#) cases, a drop from 2,662 cases the day before, [according to the province's latest report](#) released Saturday morning. Another 52 people have died from the virus.

The seven-day case average is now down to 2,603 cases daily or a 125 weekly per 100,000, according to the Star's Ed Tubb. Ontario's seven-day average is down to 50 daily.

There are 1,501 people currently hospitalized with COVID-19 in the province, including 395 patients in intensive care. There are 299 people on ventilators.

Ontario administered 11,161 [doses of the vaccine since its last daily update](#), for a total of 276,146 as of 8 p.m. the previous night. The province says 57,907 people now have two shots which means they are fully vaccinated.

Locally, Health Minister Christine Elliott says 708 of the new cases are in Toronto, 422 in Peel, 220 in York Region, 107 in Hamilton and 101 in Ottawa.

There were more than 63,500 tests completed, Elliott says.

Meanwhile, 24 more residents in long-term care have died for a total of 3,322 since the pandemic began, [according to the latest report released by the province](#).

[Read Rhythm Sachdeva's full story.](#)

3:10 p.m. Manitoba is reporting three additional deaths of people with COVID-19 as well as 216 new cases of the virus.

The province says a rapid testing centre is now taking appointments for all teachers and other school staff who work with students.

Manitoba officials report there are 272 people with COVID-19 in hospital, including 40 in intensive care.

1:50 p.m. Nunavut health officials are announcing a second active COVID-19 case in the Hudson Bay community of Arviat.

The territory had gone weeks without any new cases, but then reported one new case in Arviat on Friday.

Officials say in a news release that the second person is asymptomatic, doing well and isolating, noting contact tracing is underway.

Arviat, a community of about 2,800, had been the centre of Nunavut's largest COVID-19 outbreak and at one point had 222 cases.

Nunavut's chief public health officer says in the news release that there is no evidence of community transmission, and that the risk of the virus spreading is lower now than it was in November when the territory reported its first COVID-19 case.

1:26 p.m. Quebec is reporting 1,685 new COVID-19 cases Saturday as daily counts continue to decline.

The province is also reporting 76 new deaths attributed to COVID-19, for a total of 9,437 since the onset of the pandemic.

The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 dropped by 43, to 1,383.

1:15 p.m. Public health officials in Newfoundland and Labrador say there are no new confirmed cases of COVID-19 to report Saturday.

The province has five active cases and one person is in hospital.

There have been 398 positive cases and four deaths since the pandemic began.

1 p.m. Public health officials in New Brunswick are reporting 17 new cases of COVID-19 in the province Saturday.

Ten of the new cases are in the Edmundston region, which will go into a lockdown first thing tomorrow.

There are now 328 active cases in the province with five patients in hospital, including three in intensive care.

New Brunswick has had 1,104 positive cases and 13 deaths since the pandemic began.

12:05 a.m. Eva Lin has lost count of how many dishes are on her menu at Great Fountain, a fast food stall that's plastered with pictures of more than a hundred menu items on the front. But it's definitely more than 200.

It's a stark contrast to other restaurants — and even fast food chains — that have scaled down their menus during the [COVID-19](#) pandemic due to fewer customers and staff, as well as the need to eliminate dishes that don't translate well to takeout.

But there's a method to the seemingly overwhelming choices at this food stall inside Dynasty Centre, at Sheppard Avenue East and Glen Watford Drive in Scarborough, and it exemplifies the endless combos Hong Kong-style diner food has to offer.

[Read the full story from the Star's Karon Liu](#)

11:18 a.m. (updated) The fast-spreading U.K. COVID-19 variant has been confirmed at a Barrie, Ont., long-term-care home that has been struggling with a massive outbreak.

A COVID-19 outbreak was declared at [Roberta Place](#) on Jan. 8, and has now spread to all but three of its 127 residents and 84 staff members. So far, 29 people have died.

Public Health Ontario laboratory identified a variant of the virus in six samples on Wednesday and Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit said Saturday that a genome-sequencing test has confirmed the variant as the UK B.1.1.7.

[Read the full story from the Star's Rhythm Sachdeva](#)

10:16 a.m. (will be updated) [Ontario is reporting 2,359 cases of COVID-19, a drop from 2,662 cases the day before](#) and 52 more deaths. Around 63,500 tests were completed.

The seven-day average is down to 2,603 cases daily, or 125 weekly per 100,000. The seven-day average for deaths is up to 59.0 per day.

Labs report 63,453 tests completed and a 4.5 per cent positivity rate, still trending down, according to the Star's Ed Tubb.

Locally, there are 708 new cases in Toronto, 422 in Peel, 220 in York Region, 107 in Hamilton and 101 in Ottawa.

Ontario is also reporting 24 more resident deaths in long-term-care homes and one more staff member has also died.

9:42 a.m. The Ontario government is carrying out workplace inspections for essential businesses in Ottawa, Windsor, Niagara, and Durham this weekend to ensure public health guidelines are being followed. Provincial offence officers along with public health inspectors will visit a variety of workplaces including but not limited to retail establishments, restaurants providing take-out meals and gas stations.

"If we find that businesses are putting the safety of workers and customers at risk, our government will not hesitate to take immediate action," said Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. Corporations can now be fined \$1,000 for failing to comply with the orders. Everyone in Ontario, including employees and patrons, can also be fined \$750 for failing to comply with orders under the acts. The maximum fine for a corporation on conviction of an offence is up to \$10,000,000.

During an inspection last weekend in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, officials found 76 contraventions of lockdown rules across 240 stores. In a press release, officials confirm that 69 per cent of these businesses followed public health requirements.

9:38 a.m. Mexico President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has given state governors permission to acquire coronavirus vaccines on their own.

With coronavirus infections and COVID-19 deaths at record highs in recent days, the federal government hasn't received enough vaccine for the country's 750,000 front-line medical workers.

So state governors have been calling for permission to obtain vaccines on their own, and the president said Friday they can do so as long as they inform federal officials and use only approved vaccines.

Also, López Obrador announced Mexico plans to start vaccinating teachers and other school personnel in one of the country's 32 states this weekend with an eye toward resuming in-person classes there in late February.

Officials reported more than 21,000 confirmed infections Friday, a day after the country listed a record 22,339 cases. Deaths related to the virus in the previous 24 hours reached 1,440.

Mexico ranks No. 4 in deaths with more than 147,000, behind the U.S., Brazil and India.

9:20 a.m. A major British doctors' group says the U.K. government [should "urgently review" its decision](#) to give people a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine up to 12 weeks after the first, rather than the shorter gap recommended by the manufacturer and the World Health Organization.

The U.K., which has Europe's deadliest coronavirus outbreak, adopted the policy in order to give as many people as possible a first dose of vaccine quickly. So far almost 5.5 million people have received a shot of either a vaccine made by U.S. drugmaker Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech or one developed by U.K.-Swedish pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca and Oxford University.

AstraZeneca has said it believes a first dose of its vaccine offers protection after 12 weeks, but Pfizer says it has not tested the efficacy of its jab after such a long gap.

The British Medical Association on Saturday urged England's chief medical officer to "urgently review the U.K.'s current position of second doses after 12 weeks."

In a statement, the association said there was "growing concern from the medical profession regarding the delay of the second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as Britain's strategy has become increasingly isolated from many other countries."

8:24 a.m. Ontario could see nearly 4,000 new [COVID-19](#) cases per day by the end of March if a new variant of the virus becomes established in the population and the Province sticks to its plan to reopen all schools on Feb. 10, new forecasting shows.

The projections, by Markham-based [Scarsin Corporation](#), which specializes in disease forecasting for global pharmaceutical companies, raise the spectre of the need for more lockdowns and school closures with the proliferation of the new B117 variant, thought to be about 56 per cent more transmissible than the regular variant.

"The government of Ontario's plan to reopen schools will prevent the province from getting to 1,000 cases per day any time in the foreseeable future, because of the aggressiveness of the new variant," said Paul Minshull, CEO of Scarsin. "I recognize the Province feels it can mitigate the risk with vaccines, but that's far from certain given the delays."

[Read the full story from the Star's Kenyon Wallace](#)

7:26 a.m. Thousands of Hong Kong residents were locked down in their homes Saturday in an unprecedented move to contain a worsening coronavirus outbreak in the city.

Authorities said in a statement that an area comprising 16 buildings in the city's Yau Tsim Mong district would be locked down until all residents were tested. Residents would not be allowed to leave their homes until they received their test results to prevent cross-infection.

"Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the area have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained," the government statement said.

The restrictions, which were announced at 4 a.m. in Hong Kong, were expected to end within 48 hours, the government said.

Hong Kong has been grappling to contain a fresh wave of the coronavirus since November. Over 4,300 cases have been recorded in the last two months, making up nearly 40 per cent of the city's total.

Coronavirus cases in Yau Tsim Mong district represent about half of infections in the past week.

Approximately 3,000 people in Yau Tsim Mong had taken tests for coronavirus thus far, according to the Hong Kong government, joining the thousands of others around the crowded city of 7.5 million who have been tested in recent days.

Police guarded access points to the working-class neighbourhood of old buildings and subdivided flats and arrested a 47-year-old man after he allegedly attacked an officer. The man had reportedly been told he would have to be tested after coming into the restricted area and would not be allowed to leave until he could show a negative test result.

7:24 a.m. At the end of each day, one resident of East Nashville finds out if they've got the golden ticket—to receive one of the handful of leftover doses in the [COVID-19](#) vaccine lottery.

With the shot a scarce resource in a sputtering rollout, standby lists — for the few extra doses that can sometimes be squeezed out of vials, or if there are no-shows for appointments — have become opportunities to play the odds, and sometimes get lucky.

In Ontario, as hospitals pause first-dose appointments to prioritize those in long-term care on direction from the province due to the delays in [coming Pfizer vaccine shipments](#), staff on site can still get vaccines this way.

[Read the full story from the Star's May Warren](#)

7:23 a.m. Fear that Quebecers will catch a new variant of COVID-19 on vacation is what's driving demands by the Quebec premier for Ottawa to ban non-essential flights to the country.

Premier Francois Legault repeated once again this week that his government believes it was vacationing Quebecers during spring break in 2020 who brought the virus home, allowing it to spread earlier and more widely in the province than elsewhere in Canada.

Legal experts say a ban on non-essential travel would violate the mobility rights guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which states, "Every citizen of Canada has the right to enter, remain in and leave Canada." The question, experts say, is whether a ban can be justified.

"The Constitution is very clear that Canadians have the right to enter and leave Canada," Johanne Poirier, a McGill University law professor who specializes in Canadian federalism, said in a recent interview. But like other rights, she said, it can be limited — if the limitation is justified, reasonable and proportionate.

And given the worldwide pandemic, the courts might offer the government more flexibility, she said.

"These would not be cases where the courts would be extremely taxing or demanding on the government," she said. "But the government would still have to justify it, because there's no doubt that there's a violation of rights."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Friday his government is considering new measures that would "significantly impede" Canadians' ability to return to the country. Forcing returning travellers to quarantine in a hotel — at their expense and under police surveillance — is also on the table, he said.

Trudeau said earlier in the week he wouldn't close the border to Canadians because the Constitution protects their right to enter the country. The prime minister, however, has restricted access to the country to foreigners since the start of the pandemic.

7:20 a.m. French doctors have new advice to slow the spread of the virus: stop talking on public transport.

The French Academy of Doctors issued guidance Friday saying people should "avoid talking or making phone calls" in subways, buses or anywhere in public where social distancing isn't possible. Masks have been required since May, but travellers often loosen or remove them to talk on the phone.

Other French experts are urging more dramatic measures — notably a third lockdown.

France's hospitals now hold more COVID patients than in October, when President Emmanuel Macron imposed a second lockdown. Virus patients occupy more than half of the country's intensive care beds.

Infections in France are gradually rising this month, at more than 20,000 per day. France currently has the longest virus curfew in Europe, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., and restaurants and tourist sites have been closed since October.

The government has so far sought to avoid a full new lockdown. Protests are expected around France on Saturday against virus-related layoffs and to support those arrested for holding a techno rave party despite virus restrictions.

France has seen 72,647 virus-related deaths.

7 a.m. Ontario marked a tragic milestone Friday as the number of people who have died of [COVID-19](#) in the virus's second wave surpassed the tally recorded during the first wave.

According to the province's data, 2,813 Ontarians died of COVID-19 in the first wave before Ontario's death toll fell to its lowest point on Sept. 8. As of Friday, another 2,888 deaths have been reported since.

"We're hopefully at or around the peak of the second wave, but that means there are still a lot more deaths that will happen in the coming weeks," said Ashleigh Tuite, an infectious disease epidemiologist and mathematical modeller at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health.

[Read the full story from the Star's Ed Tubb and Kenyon Wallace](#)

Friday 4 p.m. The number of workers testing positive for COVID-19 at Canada Post's Mississauga facility has risen to 182 since Jan. 1, following four days of on-site testing, a spokesperson told the Star Friday.

Voluntarily testing will continue next week, the spokesperson said.

"The facility in Mississauga is central to our entire national delivery and processing network. The plant continues to operate with a continued focus on physical-distancing, mandatory face coverings and other safety measures. We continue to process heavy

incoming parcel volumes, however customers should expect delays.”

The Star reported earlier this week that 121 workers had tested positive at the facility. More than 4,500 people work at the Dixie Road site.

Read more about: [Mississauga](#), [Quebec](#), [Ottawa](#)

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